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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART TO PRESENT A COMPLETE RETROSPECTIVE OF HUNGARIAN FILMMAKER BÉLA TARR

Filmmaker Introduces New York Premiere of His Latest Film
Werckmeister Harmonies (2000)

The Films of Béla Tarr: Tango, Hungarian Style
October 5–15, 2001
The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1

Béla Tarr (b. 1955) has been acclaimed as one of the most innovative and accomplished auteurs working in filmmaking today, but his films are rarely shown in the United States outside the festival circuit. This complete retrospective presented by The Museum of Modern Art’s Department of Film and Media coincides with the New York opening of his latest film, Werckmeister harmóniák (Werckmeister Harmonies, 2000), which will run for one week at Anthology Film Archives following its opening night screening at MoMA. The series also celebrates the acquisition of four of Tarrás early films by the Museum’s Film Archive, all in newly struck prints from original negatives and with improved subtitling supervised by the filmmaker. The retrospective will be shown in The Museum of Modern Art’s Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1 from October 5 through October 15, 2001. The Films of Béla Tarr: Tango, Hungarian Style was organized by Jytte Jensen, Associate Curator, Department of Film and Media, with the collaboration of Filmunio (formerly Hungarofilm, Budapest).

Tarrás films, set in contemporary Hungary, move toward metaphysical explorations of human conditions and states of mind that transcend any particular environment. Specificity leads to ambiguity, chaos to order, order to disorder—but all are held together by a brilliant cinematic style of long takes and intricate camera movements. Without discernible goals or attainable dreams, his characters struggle to find their way, yet the films leave the viewer exhilarated—a dichotomy echoed in the occasionally discordant yet strangely beautiful music of Mihály Vig, which is integral to Tarrás cinema.

Jytte Jensen, Associate Curator, Department of Film and Media, notes, "In the extended opening scene of Werckmeister Harmonies, the drunk, violent, and spent men in a godforsaken dive are silently coached into performing a graceful dance illustrating the orderly movement of the planets. As violence gives way to grace, a strange beauty emerges. It is an astonishing scene that is emblematic..."
of Béla Tarrás entire oeuvre."

Developing from a more realist approach, with closer, shorter shots, a stationary camera, nonprofessional actors, and often improvised dialogue, Tarrás work became more stylistically adventurous in the 1980s. In all of the films, the various structural elements, including location and time, are harmonized according to the principles of music and dance. Sátántangó (1994), for example, is based on the tango÷its twelve parts reflecting the pattern of six steps forward, six steps back÷and like the tango, invokes the drama and passion of life itself.

Accompanying the retrospective is a booklet with essays, interviews, and appreciations by international critics, curators, and fellow filmmakers.

On October 5, Béla Tarr introduces the New York premiere of Werckmeister Harmonies. The filmmaker will be available for interviews from October 4 through October 7.

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The Films of Béla Tarr: Tango, Hungarian Style Screening Schedule:


Sátántangó

. 1994. Hungary/Germany/Switzerland. Directed by Béla Tarr. Written by Tarr and László Krasznahorkai, based on Krasznahorkaiás novel Sátántangó. Cinematography by Gábor Medvigy. With Mihály Víg, Putyi Horváth, and László Lugossy. Tarrás masterpiece to date has been hailed as a definitive statement on the end of Communism in Eastern Europe. Over seven hours long, this epic maps the crumbling of a failed collective farm into dissolution and betrayal. Tarr has said that the film’s form was inspired by the tango, with its six steps forward, six back÷an idea also reflected in the overlaps of the time scheme. The narrative is matched by stunning black-and-white cinematography and patient, serpentine camera movements. The blankets of mud and rain do not obscure Tarrás gallows humor. In Hungarian with English subtitles. Black and white. 450 min., with two intermissions. Saturday, October 6, 1:00;
Sunday, October 14, 1:00

**Családi tüzfészek**

*Family Nest*. 1978. Hungary. Written and directed by Béla Tarr. Cinematography by Ferenc Pap and Barna Mihok. With Krisztiina Horváth, László Horváth, and Gábor Kun. Tarrás debut feature won the 1978 Hungarian film criticsâ prize for best first feature and shared a grand prize at the Mannheim Festival in 1979. Raw and blunt social realism, the film is especially sensitive to the situation of women. A young couple with a child is forced by socialist Hungaryâs apartment shortage to live with the husbandâs parents in a one-room flat. As the wife unsuccessfully tries to force an application for housing through the bureaucracy, their circumstances become increasingly unbearable. In Hungarian with English subtitles. 106 min. Sunday, October 7, 2:00; Friday, October 12, 2:30

**Szabadgyalog**

*The Outsider*. 1981. Hungary. Written and directed by Béla Tarr. With István Balla, Imre Donko, and András Szabó. Working in a small industrial town, Tarr, in his second feature, readdresses many of the ideas of *Family Nest*. Claustrophobic, tightly framed shots convey the domestic tension of close, uncomfortable living quarters as a directionless male nurse and factory worker escapes the frustrations of his life by dancing, drinking, and playing the fiddle in local taverns. In Hungarian with English subtitles. 146 min. Sunday, October 7, 5:00; Thursday, October 11, 6:00

**Utazás az alföldön**

*Journey on the Plain*. 1995. Hungary. Written and directed by Béla Tarr. Cinematography by Fred Kelemen. In one of Tarrâs rare nonnarrative films, actor-composer Mihály Víg recites the poetry of Sándor Petöfi (1823â49) while playing the organ in the back of a truck moving through the plains. In Hungarian with English subtitles. 39 min.

**Panellkapcsolat (Prefab People)**. 1982. Hungary. Written and directed by Béla Tarr. Cinematography by Ferenc Pap and Barna Mihok. With Judit Pogány and Róbert Koltai. This soul-baring portrait of proletarian life in socialist Hungary examines the struggles of an unhappy family. Tarrás third feature, his first with professional actors, it is exemplary of his early cinema: loose in structure, improvisational in acting style, with generous use of a handheld camera to examine faces ravaged by despair. In Hungarian with English subtitles. Color and black and white. 102 min. Monday, October 8, 2:00; Friday, October 12, 6:00; Monday, October 15, 2:30

**Kárhozat**

landscapes and a stylized mise-en-scène. The film weaves and tracks through the plots and schemes of a dismal quartet of characters (including a dangerously attractive, smoky-voiced cabaret singer). Imaginative visual wipes between scenes advance Tarr’s hallmark fluidity with the camera. For Tarr the story is secondary: "The film is about the landscape, the elements, and nature, about a unique world in which nothing remains." In Hungarian with English subtitles. Black and white. 116 min. Print courtesy Artificial Eye, London. Monday, October 8, 5:00; Saturday, October 13, 3:00

Öszi almanach

(Almanac of Fall). 1985. Hungary. Written and directed by Béla Tarr. Cinematography by Sándor Kardos, Ferenc Pap, and Buda Gulyas. With Hédi Temessy, Érika Bodnár, and Miklos B. Szőkely. In a crumbling apartment, an older woman and her entourage quarrel, maneuver, and betray. The emotional climate is worthy of Strindberg. The visual design, with its blue-gray and orange-red lighting, stresses the artificiality of the closed environment, and the camera’s exaggerated angles and slow but constant movement comment on the characters’ power struggle. In Hungarian with English subtitles. 119 min. Tuesday, October 9, 2:30; Saturday, October 13, 5:15; Monday, October 15, 6:00

Macbeth

. 1982. Hungary. Directed by Béla Tarr. Made for television, this version of Shakespeare’s Macbeth contains only two shots, of five and sixty-seven minutes respectively. For critic Jonathan Rosenbaum it marks a turning point in Tarr’s career: "Practically all the important action is staged in the foreground, with the camera following some characters and picking up others as it relentlessly tracks their movements and machinations through fog, torchlight, and dank, grottolike settings. ...this video reprises elements from Tarr’s first three features while anticipating the extended, choreographed camera movements and metaphysical demonology of his second three." In Hungarian with English subtitles. 72 min. Tuesday, October 9, 6:00; Friday, October 12, 8:30

Az utolso hajo

(The Last Boat). 1990. The Netherlands. Directed by Béla Tarr. Written by Tarr and László Krasznahorkai. Cinematography by Gábor Medvigy. This portrait of Budapest at the brink of a new social order was included in the international compilation film City Life. 32 min.

Hat bagatell (Six Bagatelles). 1989. Hungary. Directed by Béla Tarr, István Dárday, Andráš Jelles, Gábor Bódy, Pál Wilt, and György Fehér. This compilation of six short student films assembled by Fehér, several years after their making, as an introduction to the Budapest School provides insights into Tarr’s beginnings and their context. In Hungarian with French subtitles. 85 min. Thursday, October 11, 2:30; Saturday, October 13, 1:00
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